



Lesson Three: Sexual Offenders and Factors that Contribute to Sexual Assault

Method of Instruction:	Lecture/Large Group Discussion
Total Time Allotted:	60 minutes
Media:	Slides 14-16
Handouts:	Factors that Contribute to Sexual Assault
References:	Finkelhor, D (1986) A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills, CA

Show Slide 14 (Lesson Title Slide)



Lesson Three

Sexual Offenders and Factors That Contribute to Sexual Assault

1. (1 minute) Overview: This lesson will provide an opportunity for attendees to identify and discuss conditions that contribute to the occurrence of a sexual assault. The lesson will start with a brief presentation of a framework by which to organize various factors that can contribute to sexual assault. Attendees will then have an opportunity to identify contributing factors and discuss how these factors apply to their installations.

Learning Objectives: (Slide 15)

Learning Objectives

- Understand underlying conditions and factors contributing to sexual assault
- Identify conditions that contribute to the occurrence of sexual assault that are evident at attendees' specific locations.



Background for Instructor: There are numerous theories to explain sexual assault. Some theorists take an approach that looks at psychodynamics of the offender; others look at what the victim may have done to precipitate an assault, while feminists address the unequal power distributions between males and females as a contributing factor. Each of the theories that have been developed to explain why sexual assaults happen has unique limitations. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to discuss the theories of assault in great detail.

However, this lesson draws on the Four Precondition Model developed by David Finkehor in the early 1980s to provide a descriptive framework that encompasses the various theories of why child sexual abuse occurs. The model has utility for this lesson in addressing the multi-faceted explanations of adult sexual assault. The model frames contributing factors into four categories. These include:

- Factors that address an offender's motivation to commit a sexual assault. Examples include: an offender's desire to exert control or power, an offender's desire to degrade victims, or an offender's desire to get what he/she wants despite the victim's wishes
- Factors that address an offender's ability to overcome inhibitions against committing a sexual assault. (Not everyone who wants to exert power or control sexually assaults to do so. Examples of an offender's ability to overcome his or her own inhibitions against sexual assaults include: a belief system that a victim wants or deserves to be assaulted, use of alcohol or drugs)
- Factors that address an offender's ability to overcome external (societal) inhibitors to sexual assault. Examples of this include offenders taking advantage of unsecured or poorly lighted areas; societal tolerance for sexual crimes against adults; broad acceptance of myths related to sexual assault; limited efforts to change societal attitudes toward sexual assault.
- Factors that address an offender's ability to overcome a victim's inhibitors to sexual assault. Examples of this include use of "date rape" drugs, alcohol use by victims, and use of physical force.

Under this model, some aspect of each factor has to be present in order for an assault to occur.



2. (5 minutes) Presentation.

Show Slide 16 (Pre-Conditions to Sexual Assault)



Pre-Conditions to Sexual Assault

- Offender Motivation
- Offender overcomes his/her own inhibitions against assault
- Offender overcomes external inhibitions
- Offender overcomes victim inhibitions

In this section, the instructor should present a brief overview of this framework for use in identifying factors that can contribute to the occurrence of sexual assault. Indicate to the attendees that each condition has to be present in some form for a sexual assault to occur. Give examples of each. Stress that the value in looking at sexual assaults in this manner is that the emphasis is on what the offender does, while also recognizing that there are beliefs and attitudes present in our communities that contribute to enabling sexual assaults to occur.

3. (55 minutes.) Large group discussion.

The instructor should post four flip chart sheets with one of the four categories listed on each sheet. Then, ask the audience to identify why/how they think offenders are able to sexually assault. For each item mentioned, list it on the appropriate sheet. For example, if someone says “NCOs on the post openly identify that women are deployed to ensure sexual partners for other Soldiers,” this is a belief system that could contribute to condoning of sexual assault. List that on “overcomes external inhibitions.” If someone says “offenders are sexually deviant,” list that under offender motivation.

Encourage the attendees to identify as many factors as they can. If they have trouble getting started, use the handout that will be distributed a little later in the session to prompt them with comments such as “what kinds of behaviors did Frank describe in his interview (tape in Lesson Two) that fit under these categories?” Likely answers would be preparation of alcohol spiked punch to overcome the victim’s inhibitions, use of



restraint across the victim's throat to overcome victim inhibitions, lack of empathy for victims as a means to overcome internal inhibitions, membership in a group that allows rooms to be prepped for sex with party attendees as a form of overcoming external inhibitions.

If you find that the list of factors that are specific to the offender (motivation or overcoming internal inhibitions) are sounding like offenders are the mentally ill rapist who attacks strangers in the park, remind them that those types of offenders certainly do exist but that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by individuals known to the victim. Prompt them to think about the types of offenses that they may be likely to see in a deployed environment. Also, as the attendees identify means by which external inhibitors to sexual assault are overcome, encourage them to think about the external environment in deployed locations. Examples might include: mixed gender sleeping areas, remote posts, poorly lighted camps, cultural views of women.

Be prepared for some individuals to bring up factors that fall into a category of blaming the victim. These might include comments about the victim's clothing, character, behavior or acquaintance with the offender. If they try to say that these factors contributed to overcoming the offender's inhibitions, redirect them with a reminder that the offender first has to have a motivation to sexually offend, and that justifications such as "she wouldn't have dressed like that if she hadn't wanted me to do what I did" are rationalizations to excuse the behavior.

After the attendees appear to have exhausted the lists that they can identify, pass out Handout #5 "Factors that Contribute to Sexual Assault." Ask if they see any that they did not already identify. (Most likely they will have identified some that are not on the chart.)

If time allows, encourage a discussion of the manner in which they see the factors in action on their installation. Emphasize the point that sexual assault does not happen unless an offender is motivated to offend.